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July 8, 2003

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Richard Shumsky *RS*
Chief Probation Officer

SUBJECT: OPERATION READ

This is in response to your Board's request on June 24, 2003 to provide a status report on the Operation Read program. On that date, your Board approved \$790,000 in funding for the community-based component of the program. Operation Read targets at-risk and probation youth and is an umbrella for after-school literacy enrichment efforts. Operation Read supplements the school efforts to improve literacy and encourage reading. The Department's review of the Operation Read program indicates that we continue to make progress both with youth who have significant literacy needs as well as to encourage probation youth to read. We also want to take this opportunity to update your Board as we continue to expand our efforts and refine the strategies to better serve youth in the Operation Read program.

The Operation Read strategies have focused on providing youth with after-school literacy tutoring (groups and individual), computer-based literacy training, books as incentives to encourage reading, the establishment of libraries in the juvenile halls and camps, and community-based reading incentive programs in collaboration with schools. Improving the literacy of our youth aids them both to stay in school and to achieve academically. The overwhelming majority of probation youth are reading below grade level and are performing poorly in school. The research has shown the strong link between delinquency and illiteracy; therefore, improving literacy continues to be a major element of our delinquency prevention efforts.

Program Outcomes and Results:

- **Average growth was 1.92 grade levels in reading for Operation Read youth in the juvenile halls and camps**

In the juvenile halls and camps, the group and individualized tutoring of Operation Read has focused on those with the lowest reading scores, those reading below fourth grade level. Since its inception, the program

has serviced 2,585 youth. The average beginning reading score for the minors was 3.33 and the average ending score was 5.25. The Operation Read expenditures for institutions for the last fiscal year was \$864,920.52 and the per capita cost was \$617.80 for the 1,400 minors tutored last year.

- **Average growth was 2.01 grade levels in reading for Operation Read youth in community programs**

The community sites available through Long-Term Family Self-Sufficiency provided tutoring services to 797 children. The average growth was 2.01 grade levels in reading. The average beginning score was 2.76 and the average ending score was 4.76. Of the 797 youth in the community phase, 475 foster care youth were served, 239 were probation youth and the remaining 83 were from CalWorks families.

There were linkages between the Probation facilities phase and the community phase of the program. Two hundred fifty-four minors transitioned between the institutional phase and the community phase and vice versa. The Operation Read expenditures for the community program last year were \$577,787.62 with a per capita cost of \$874.36 for the 660 minors tutored during the year.

- **Establishing 23 libraries at Probation Juvenile Facilities**

As an effort to promote reading and literacy for all the minors in the Probation facilities, a key component of the Operation Read strategy was to establish libraries in the day rooms in each camp and each unit in the juvenile halls. This major effort over a two-year period has now been completed.

- **Building library resources with over 25,372 books**

The libraries are stocked and being replenished with over 25,372 books that have been purchased with Operation Read funds, obtained through a Verizon grant, and donations through generous sponsors such as the Church of Our Savior in Alhambra and an organization called Access Books.

- **Providing over 18,839 books to youth as rewards and incentives**

For the last two years Operation Read has administered a Reading Is Fundamental grant that provides books to youth as incentives to increase their enjoyment of reading. Through this program, Operation Read provided 8,130 new books last year for distribution to the minors and there are currently 10,709 books to be distributed between now and the end of

September. Many camps give the minor a book on the day he is released. Other occasions for book distributions include birthdays and holidays.

- **Involving over 5,000 youth in the community in school-based events to promote literacy**

In the community, public reading events and recognition activities have been available to the minors in the community phase. One event, which gave various schools copies of the book "Lord of the Rings," resulted in 1,000 minors from fifteen middle schools attending the movie at a special showing and 4,000 for the sequel. The minors attending this second event, representing 30 schools across the county, were all asked to write book reports or essays which gave them entry into the movie. One minor won a trip to New Zealand for her and her family. A third book reading and essay contest is being planned around the last of the "Lord of the Rings trilogy-"The Return of the King". It is anticipated that over 10, 000 youth will participate in this reading event. Another community event for the youth, which involved reading a book before seeing the movie was "Holes," a Newberry and National Book Award winning book. In all over 18,000 books were donated to students in local schools.

- **Pilot computer assisted instruction**

Computer-assisted instruction, HEC Discovering Intensive Phonics, is one of the newer efforts of Operation Read. Following a pilot test in the Long Beach area where the minors were completing the phonics lessons with 95% accuracy, LACOE has purchased the same software to be utilized in the Probation facilities during the after-school tutoring sessions. This new software was delivered in late June and training on its usage will be held in July.

Core Competencies for Instruction

Operation Read provides for tutorial literacy service for probation, foster care, and at-risk youth, 10 to 17.5 years of age, reading below grade level. Youth in the program are tutored up to 24 weeks by trained staff through various instructional methods. In the juvenile halls and the camps, the Star Advantage assessment was utilized to assess progress; in the community, the San Diego Quick Reading test was utilized.

The Literacy Pro software, a commercially available literacy database, is used to collect, manage, and analyze the data concerning the students, tutors, time spent in tutoring and progress made. Probation staff input information on every student, the tutors with whom the student is matched, initial test scores, post-test(s) if available, any tracking data, and other information helpful in developing and maintaining a case plan.

The Operation Read Task Force, consisting of one member from each of the five county departments involved in the program's development, continues to provide support to Operation Read; the five departments are: Probation, Children and Family Services, Superior Court, Public Library and Office of Education. One recent example of such collaboration is the donation of the library books from MacLaren Hall to the libraries at the Probation camps. The Operation Read staff are trained by the Los Angeles County Public Library Literacy Program in the core competencies.

The research indicates that phonetic awareness, word analysis, fluency, vocabulary building and reading comprehension are the key competency areas to becoming a proficient reader and acquiring the requisite foundation for reading at the most basic level. As indicated below, these are the core instructional areas in the Operation Read program.

- **Phonetic Awareness**
Phonetic awareness is the most basic building block of learning to read as the English language depends on a sound – symbol relationship.
- **Word Analysis**
Word analysis refers to syllabication (or the ability to break a word into parts as an aid to pronouncing words) as well as the use of root words, prefixes and suffixes.
- **Fluency**
Fluency also denotes the amount of text that can be possessed in a given amount of time.
- **Vocabulary Building**
Word knowledge is an important aspect of reading as a student needs to be able to connect a meaning to a word read.

- **Reading Comprehension**

Comprehension moves from picture/word relationships to simple sentences, which are a few words in length, to compound and then to complex sentences. Reading difficulty is an interrelationship between word count and number of syllables.

Program Challenges

Perhaps the most significant challenge has been to recognize that while a number of youth have been served, many more have reading deficiencies and need help. The most significant impact continues to be achieved through schools. They have the requisite resources and expertise to most effectively address the literacy needs of probation and at-risk youth. Most of these youth need the resources of the school and the additional help to improve literacy and encourage reading. Operation Read has been able to demonstrate that after-school programs can effectively supplement the work being done in the schools to improve literacy. We also need to support, access, and collaborate with other effective community-based literacy programs.

During the course of Operation Read, we have been confronted with operational and program challenges. The significant challenges include difficulty in recruiting and retaining paid and volunteer staff; delay in background clearances for paid and volunteer staff; and problems in collecting pre/post assessment tests.

We have also come to the conclusion that Operation Read services work best when there is a clear, strong link with case management. As with all other services for at-risk youth, the services need to be monitored and structured or there will be inconsistent implementation.

The tutoring component of Operation Read has been based on a combination of services through paid staff (student workers, community workers, or employees of community-based organizations) as well as volunteers. While we have had a few outstanding volunteers that have been committed, volunteer services have been difficult to sustain over time.

The Department also recognizes that the newly approved funding should tie to the ability to produce some specific outcomes. Should the Department not achieve the results by December 31, 2003, we are prepared to return 50% of the funding and pursue the objectives in other ways.

Restructured Program

In view of the program challenges, as well as the lessons learned from the Department's review of Operation Read, a restructured Operation Read model is merited. The restructured model addresses and remedies the barriers and limitations of the current model.

Operation Read Tutorial Services

Direct Operation Read tutorial and instructional activities will continue to be provided by volunteers and CBO staff but will be supplemented by increased involvement of trained Probation and school staff.

- **Probation Case Management**

In every component of Operation Read, juvenile hall, camp and community, Probation staff will provide linkages to case management. Case management will include: incorporating Operation Read into case planning; coordination and integration of Operation Read services with that of the schools; setting appropriate goals and expectations for outcome results (to be achieved jointly with school and Operation Read staff); monitoring of attendance and program participation; conducting bi-monthly conferences with school, contractor and Operation Read staff; and when and where possible, link youth with post Operation Read services.

- **Program Monitoring**

The restructured program will assign staff to monitor program performance. The monitors will provide monthly written reports. The report will cover: number of program participants, number and percentage of youth with pre/post assessment test, staffing patterns and issues, case management, number and percentage of youth who successfully complete the program, quality of service delivery, and corrective action and technical assistance.

Program Performance and Outcome Measures

As it relates to the \$790,000 community-based funding of Operation Read, the Department expects to achieve the following goals by December 31, 2003:

- ✓ A minimum of 500 youth will be enrolled and actively participating in Operation Read tutoring.

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- ✓ Of the 500 youth, 70% will complete 40 hours of Operation Read instructions.
- ✓ Of the 500 youth enrolled, 60% will improve their reading level by at least one grade level.

RS/js
CC: Executive Office of the Board